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Sustainable development: follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Sustainable Development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 71/224, entitled "Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations", in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its seventy-third session on the status of implementation of the resolution. A range of activities undertaken at the national and regional levels by Member States, international development partners and other stakeholders to advance the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea are highlighted in the report. In addition, the annex contains a report of the Association of Caribbean States on progress made in implementation of the resolution.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 71/224, entitled "Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations", the General Assembly recognized that the Caribbean Sea was an area with unique biodiversity and highly fragile ecosystems and that, when compared with all other marine ecosystems, was surrounded by the largest number of countries in the world, many of which rely heavily on the marine environment for economic growth and sustainable development. The Assembly welcomed the continued efforts of Caribbean States to develop and implement regional initiatives to promote the sustainable conservation and management of coastal and marine resources and recalled the creation of the Caribbean Sea Commission of the Association of Caribbean States. In that regard, the Assembly invited the international community and the United Nations system to enhance their support to Caribbean countries and their regional organizations in efforts to implement the plan of action adopted by the Commission. The General Assembly also invited the Association to submit a report to the Secretary-General on progress made in implementation of the resolution, for consideration by the Assembly at its seventy-third session (see annex).

2. For the preparation of the present report, information was obtained through research and inputs from United Nations system organizations and regional and subregional organizations operating in the Caribbean.[1]

II. Legal and institutional landscape for the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea

3. Countries in the wider Caribbean region increasingly understand the interconnectedness of Caribbean Sea ecosystems, the transboundary nature of most issues affecting the marine resources in the region and the need for collaborative management of their shared resources. This is demonstrated by their significant commitment to participating in key global and regional multilateral environmental agreements. There is, however, considerable variation in the capacity of countries to effectively implement and monitor such agreements.

4. The Caribbean States are party to a number of international and regional agreements relating to the governance of ocean resources. Relevant global agreements include the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks; the Convention on Biological Diversity; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto, with its six annexes.

5. The regional agreements and instruments of relevance include the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region (the Cartagena Convention); the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas; the agreement establishing the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism and Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy; the

[1] Inputs were received from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean Community(CARICOM) Secretariat, the University of the West Indies; the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission; the Association of Caribbean States; and the United Nations Development Programme/Global Environment Facility Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems project.

Revised Statutes of the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission; the Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions establishing agreement; the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles; and the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of the Shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project.

6. Global and regional organizations also play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements; there are several such organizations, whose activities are particularly relevant to the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. Some are regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, the secretariat of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)[2] and the Association of Caribbean States. Others are regional bodies of United Nations entities, for example, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Caribbean Regional Coordinating Unit, and the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), an independent regional fisheries management organization. There is also a number of regional civil society organizations.

7. The regional bodies with specific mandates for the management of ocean-related activities are the following:

(a) **UNEP Caribbean Regional Coordinating Unit**. This is the secretariat for the Caribbean Environment Programme and the Cartagena Convention and its protocols. The protocols relate to oil spills, land-based sources of marine pollution and specially protected areas and wildlife. The Caribbean Environment Programme also has a mandate to promote implementation in the wider Caribbean region of the Convention on Biodiversity, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. The Programme's membership includes all countries of the wider Caribbean region except Brazil;

(b) **Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission of FAO**. It was constituted under article VI of the FAO Constitution;

(c) **Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions**. It serves to implement the Commission's mandate in the wider Caribbean region. The Sub-Commission has implemented a number of science and information-sharing projects in the region, including the Caribbean Marine Atlas, and is also responsible for promoting ocean acidification monitoring in the region;

(d) **International Maritime Organization**. The organization has a regional office in Trinidad and Tobago and is supporting the Caribbean Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control, the secretariat of which is in Jamaica.

8. Civil society organizations play an important role in facilitating stakeholder engagement in ocean governance. The most prominent of these are the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, which focuses on community involvement in management and has a coastal and marine programme; the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations, which promotes representation of fishers in regional

[2] The OECS secretariat is supporting the implementation of the Eastern Caribbean Regional Ocean Policy. The Policy promotes a common approach to ocean governance in all OECS member States and has a number of priorities and goals, many of which are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

fisheries matters in CARICOM; and the Association of Marine Laboratories of the Caribbean, which provides a forum for exchange of information among laboratories.

9. For the majority of countries in the region, the importance of building the shared capacity needed for the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea cannot be overstated. This is also important for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including all of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. Countries in the wider Caribbean region recognize the increasing role that global and regional authorities, civil society organizations and international development partners must play in boosting resilience and increasing gains in the economic, social and environmental domains.

III. Current activities of Caribbean States and other key stakeholders

A. United Nations Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework

10. The major regional activity relating to the assessment of a baseline to gauge the current status and subsequent implementation of efforts aimed at achieving the full suite of Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 14, in the Caribbean region is the United Nations Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework for the Caribbean. One of the four priority areas of the Framework — namely, a sustainable and resilient Caribbean — addresses several Goals, including Goal 14. This priority area focuses on support for strengthening institutional and community resilience at the regional and national levels in terms of natural resources management; the protection and sustainable use of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems; renewable energy systems; and inclusive and sustainable societies.

11. The 2017–2021 Framework defines how the various agencies, funds, and programmes of the United Nations system will pool their comparative advantages within a single strategic framework that aligns with and supports the overarching strategic goals of the Caribbean's Governments and key stakeholders. The expectation is to allow for a focus on common priorities, enhance regional initiatives and collaboration and enable knowledge-sharing and cross-collaboration within the region. In order to facilitate this, the entities of the United Nations system in the Caribbean will work with committees and institutions established with CARICOM and OECS to identify subregional initiatives and programmes for implementation through the Framework.

B. Land-based and marine-based sources of pollution

12. The Caribbean Sea region is being endangered by pollution from both land- and sea-based sources. The Cartagena Convention covers several aspects of marine pollution for which the Contracting Parties must adopt specific measures. The Convention, which has been ratified by 25 States Members of the United Nations in the wider Caribbean region, covers the marine environment of the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea and adjacent areas of the Atlantic Ocean, south of 30th parallel north and within 200 nautical miles of the Atlantic coasts of the contracting party States.

13. The UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme continues to actively promote accession to and ratification of the Cartagena Convention's protocols as well as activities for the implementation of the obligations under the protocols at the national

and regional levels. The agreement for hosting the Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities at the Institute of Marine Affairs in Trinidad and Tobago was signed by UNEP and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in July 2017. Discussions are ongoing between the Caribbean Environment Programme and the Government of Cuba for the formalization of the country's Centre of Engineering and Environmental Management of Coasts and Bays as the other Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities. A memorandum of understanding was also signed by the Caribbean Environment Programme and the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute in Trinidad and Tobago to focus on analytical testing and techniques for water, wastewater and air, land-based interventions for improving water quality in marine and freshwater environments, groundwater and aquifer assessment, alternative processes and technologies for waste management and climate change mitigation.

14. The working group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment of the Caribbean Environment Programme continued to further develop the "state of the Convention area report", which is intended to respond to gaps in monitoring and assessment programmes of patterns and trends in the environmental quality of the Convention area.

15. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management Plus project identification form was developed by the Caribbean Environment Programme, Inter-American Development Bank and the GEF Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management Project Management Unit. It was submitted to the GEF secretariat for consideration in July 2016. Following the approval of the project concept in November 2017, close liaison has begun with all countries to secure their input, endorsement and financing for the project.

16. The Caribbean Environment Programme also worked with the Project Management Unit of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project to support the implementation of project activities. The focus during the reporting period was on developing a proposal for an ecosystem-based management project for the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf. The proposal was finalized, submitted and approved by the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project Coordinating Unit and will provide approximately $300,000 in financial support for activities in Brazil, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

17. The Caribbean Environment Programme and FAO convened a joint inception workshop for the two UNDP/GEF Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems and ecosystem-based management sub-projects for the North Brazil Shelf. The workshop focused on the FAO-led ecosystem approach to fisheries project and UNEP-led ecosystems-based management project for pollution and habitats. The joint effort will facilitate the coordinated implementation of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems sub-projects on shrimp and groundfish and on strengthening ecosystems-based management frameworks and ocean governance in the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem.

18. During the 2017 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic and the Caribbean Environment Programme registered a voluntary commitment to collaborate across the Atlantic and wider Caribbean region. The focal areas identified for interregional cooperation include marine protected areas, marine litter and ecosystem-based approaches. Project activities will include a marine litter database and monitoring of those marine protected areas managed by the Caribbean Environment Programme and Caribbean Marine Protected Area Management Network and Forum. To raise public awareness

and outreach, a conference will be organized to focus on marine litter and marine protected area issues. Training and capacity-building will also be enhanced within the partnership with a full-sized project proposal on marine protected area monitoring. So far, funding support for the partnership has been secured from the Government of Netherlands in the amount of £10,000 ($11,807) and the Government of Sweden in the amount of 1,000,000 SEK ($115,806).

19. The first joint United Nations human security programme, on strengthening human resilience in Northern Clarendon and West Kingston, Jamaica, is being jointly implemented by the Government of Jamaica and five United Nations entities in the country: FAO, the Pan American Health Organization, UNDP, UNEP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Over a three-year period (November 2017 to October 2020), the Caribbean Environment Programme will support the implementation of activities related to improving water and sanitation in selected vulnerable communities in Jamaica. Activities will include development of effective models for participatory management and operation of community-based water systems and training stakeholders in the design, construction, use and maintenance of water harvesting systems. Funding is being provided by the Government of Jamaica, the United Nations entities and the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security.

20. The Caribbean Environment Programme continues to collaborate with the recently established UNEP Subregional Office for the Caribbean in Jamaica. The Office was established in February 2016 to strengthen the presence of UNEP in the Caribbean. Like the Caribbean Environment Programme, the work of the Office is based on an integrated approach to the sustainable use and management of natural resources and ecosystems. The Office helps countries of the Caribbean to programme activities jointly through the Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework. This partnership enables greater synergies and coordination between the work of UNEP and the Caribbean Environment Programme. Areas of collaboration to date have focused on waste and chemicals management.

21. The Caribbean Environment Programme finalized a report on the status of plastics and Styrofoam (expanded polystyrene foam) bans in the wider Caribbean region. A growing number of Governments are committed to or have been introducing policies to regulate the production, import and use of plastic bags and Styrofoam products. The report summarizes policies and bans that have been implemented in the region, identifies lessons learned for policymakers that will assist in future efforts to regulate the use and production of disposable plastics and analyses the bans that are in action or are to be promulgated among all the countries of the region.

C. Projects

22. There are several ongoing regional and subregional projects that are contributing to the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. They are funded by a wide range of donors and focus on an array of themes. Some of the most significant are described below.

1. Caribbean Challenge Initiative

23. The Caribbean Challenge Initiative is a coalition of Governments, companies and partners working together to accelerate action on the marine and coastal environment. Founded in 2008 by a group of Caribbean Governments to enhance the conservation of their marine and coastal resources, the Initiative has since grown to include private sector partners and garner over $75 million in funding commitments. Governments and territories signed a Caribbean Challenge Initiative Leaders

Declaration in May 2013 committing them to protect and conserve 20 per cent of their marine and coastal resources by 2020 (target 14.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals).

2. Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program

24. The overall objective of the United States Agency for International Development-funded Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program is to reduce threats to marine-coastal biodiversity in priority areas in the Caribbean, including high biodiversity ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds, in order to achieve sustained biodiversity conservation, maintain critical ecosystem services and realize tangible improvements in human well-being for communities adjacent to marine protected areas. The project involves actions at four geographic levels (site, seascape, national and regional) and specifically targets seven priority marine protected areas within four Caribbean priority seascapes: the Dominican Republic; Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Haiti; and Jamaica. The programme runs from 2014 to 2019.

3. Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystem Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States

25. Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystem Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States is a five-year (2016–2021) regional multi-focal area project with a GEF cash allocation of $20.7 million and a total budget of $88.7 million, including cash and in-kind co-financing. There are 10 participating Caribbean countries. UNEP and UNDP are the co-implementing entities, with UNEP as the lead agency. The Caribbean Environment Programme is the lead co-executing agency, with the Caribbean Public Health Agency as the other. The project's primary goal is to implement an integrated approach to water, land and ecosystems services management, supported by policy, institutional and legislative reforms, and to implement effective appropriate technologies to accelerate contribution to global targets on access to safe and reliable water supplies. The project also works on innovative solutions for reduced pollution and improved fresh- and coastal water resources, considering the additional challenges imposed by climate change and climate variability.

26. Work has commenced under the project on a marine litter policy assessment report, focusing on bans on Styrofoam and single-use plastic bags already in place or under preparation in the wider Caribbean region. It is expected that lead institutions, OECS and the Caribbean Public Health Agency will, with partners, further advance the policy and legislative aspects related to marine litter.

4. Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project

27. The Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project is focused on an ecosystem approach to the governance of transboundary living marine resources in the wider Caribbean region. Countries of the region have been working to address transboundary governance, with the support of the GEF, through two development phases (1998–1999 and 2006–2008) and two full phases (2009–2013 and 2015–2020) of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystems and adjacent areas project covering the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf large marine ecosystems. This has included transboundary diagnostic analyses for the three fishery ecosystems and for governance and the preparation of the project's Strategic Action Programme as a road map for improved ocean governance for the period 2015–2025. The Strategic Action Programme has been signed by 25 countries in the region, and all the major regional organizations with responsibility for aspects of ecosystem-based management of oceans are engaged in its implementation.

28. The Strategic Action Programme is structured around a regional ocean governance framework to enhance governance efforts under six strategic themes that are aimed at protecting the marine environment and sustainable fisheries, developing a regional policy coordinating mechanism for living marine resources and promoting ecosystem-based management of reefs and associated ecosystems, pelagic ecosystems and continental shelf ecosystems. It should be noted that GEF funding serves only to catalyse rather than cover in full the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme. The project therefore focuses on partnership-building. In fact, all regional organizations are providing considerable support for the Programme in the form of core activities and projects funded from other sources.

29. Through the project, two memorandums of understanding promoting enhanced collaboration with regional organizations have been formalized. The Interim Coordination Mechanism for Sustainable Fisheries, encompassing three regional fisheries bodies (Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism and Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization), is aimed at enhancing regional governance for sustainable fisheries by formalizing an interim arrangement to facilitate, support and strengthen the coordination of actions among the Regional Fisheries Bodies in the Western Central Atlantic region. The Interim Coordination Mechanism of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Strategic Action Programme, which was formalized in August 2017, seeks to enhance regional coordination and collaboration, support oversight and integration of actions for sustainable fisheries and the protection and sustainable use of the marine environment.

30. Eight organizations make up the Interim Coordination Mechanism: FAO, represented by the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission; UNEP, represented by its Caribbean Regional Coordinating Unit and secretariat to the Cartagena Convention; the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization; the Central American Commission for Environment and Development; the CARICOM secretariat; the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism; and the OECS Commission.

31. The Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project also supports the development of regional strategies, action plans and investment plans to address unsustainable fisheries, habitat degradation and community modification, and pollution. The project is also facilitating the development of an overarching framework for monitoring and evaluating progress in the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme as well as the preparation of an integrated, sustainable and institutionalized assessment and reporting mechanism on the state of the marine environment and associated economies. Through that assessment and reporting process, the available data and information on the state of the marine environment, associated governance mechanisms/processes and socioeconomic factors will be transformed and made accessible to regional and national-level policy and decision-makers and to the global donor and development aid community, thus providing a basis for informed decision-making in support of enhanced marine resources governance.

32. The large marine ecosystem concept provides a meaningful geospatial concept for forging and promoting collaboration for ecosystem-based management among various stakeholders. Efforts to better engage regional civil society organizations in implementation of the project's Strategic Action Programme are currently ongoing, including through the development of a dedicated "civil society" version of the Strategic Action Programme. With the financial support of the project, efforts are also ongoing to formalize and progressively expand a global partnership for the protection, sustainable management and use of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf large marine ecosystems.

5. Marine litter management

33. Marine pollution and coastal degradation have become serious development issues in the wider Caribbean region. Coastal and marine ecosystems are being negatively affected by pollution, including solid waste and marine litter, which threatens livelihoods through economic losses to the tourism, shipping and fishing sectors in particular. The impact of marine pollution also poses risks to human health.

34. The UNEP Regional Seas Coordination Office and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities developed the Global Initiative on Marine Litter for establishing and developing pilot activities in regions that are most affected. This initiative provides a global platform for the establishment of partnerships, cooperation and coordination of activities for the control and sustainable management of marine litter.

35. The Global Partnership on Marine Litter supports the work of the Global Partnership on Waste Management to reduce and manage marine litter and thereby protect human health and the marine environment. It also addresses the ecological and economic impacts of marine litter globally. The Caribbean node of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter was launched in 2016 and is co-hosted by the Caribbean Environment Programme and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, a regional not-for-profit organization. Several activities have been initiated under the umbrella of marine litter management within the region.

36. The UNEP #CleanSeas campaign launch was announced at the 2017 World Ocean Summit in Bali, Indonesia. The campaign is aimed at eliminating major sources of marine litter, such as microplastics in cosmetics and single-use plastics, over the next five years. Within one year of the launch of the global campaign, the Governments of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, France, Grenada, Panama and Saint Lucia made commitments under the campaign to eliminate marine litter. In June 2018, Guyana also joined the initiative.

37. One challenge facing the wider Caribbean region is poorly developed solid waste management infrastructure, which gives rise to waste streams that negatively affect inland waterways (including streams and gullies), rivers, coastal communities, and marine ecosystems. The Trash Free Waters initiative in the Caribbean aims to reducing marine litter by improving solid waste management. Jamaica, as a pilot country, will work with partners to control, reduce and prevent land-based sources of trash and solid waste from entering waterways and polluting the coastal and marine environment.

38. The Caribbean Environment Programme, with financial support from the Environmental Protection Agency of the United States of America, will promote synergies and coordination between various ongoing solid waste and marine litter projects and activities, and assist participating countries in developing a more integrated and cohesive approach to solid waste and marine litter management with an emphasis on local communities. The Caribbean Environment Programme will guide the process and work with non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and other stakeholders in the region to help implement these solid waste/marine litter management projects and to promote a more consistent message to stakeholders and the public concerning solid waste management.

39. In Jamaica, the Sandals Foundation is coordinating the implementation of project activities in the towns of Bluefields and White House. Work has been initiated within the communities to identify solid waste priorities and monitoring and clean-up sites. Links were also established with the national project on plastic waste minimization, supported by the UNEP Subregional Office for the Caribbean. That project is aimed at enhancing the legislative framework for improved waste

management systems to reduce plastic marine litter generated from land-based activities. The two-year project (2018–2020) is funded through the International Environmental Technology Centre in Japan and is valued at approximately $700,000.

6. Ocean acidification

40. Adapting to climate change is also important for the Caribbean Sea region. As part of the International Atomic Energy Agency's regional programme in Latin America and the Caribbean, a project entitled "Strengthening regional monitoring and response for sustainable marine and coastal environments" is being implemented. The project focuses on raising awareness of the results of the previous project[3] and has the ultimate goal of improving marine-environment management of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean through actionable information provided through a monitoring and response network.

D. Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

41. The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission was established in 1973 by the FAO Council and currently comprises 33 countries and the European Union as members. Almost all Caribbean and Central American countries are members of the Commission, whose objective is to promote the conservation, management and development of living marine resources in the Commission's area of operation, in line with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and to address common fisheries management and development problems faced by Commission members.

42. During the reporting period, a range of activities have been undertaken by the Commission's secretariat. This included development of the GEF-funded project, Developing Organizational Capacity for Ecosystem Stewardship and Livelihoods in Caribbean Small-Scale Fisheries (known as StewardFish), which commenced in early 2017, and the Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin America and Caribbean Trawl Fisheries project. The latter is a $5.6 million project that promotes the international by-catch guidelines and introduces by-catch reduction technology to the region.

43. Support for the application of the international Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries was carried out in close collaboration with the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, the University of the West Indies Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations, various national fisherfolk organizations and national fisheries divisions and departments.

44. The Regional Working Group on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, established by the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission at its 15th session, was convened by the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism with financial support from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States Department of Commerce, the European Union, the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project and the World Bank-funded Caribbean Billfish Project. Two meetings of the Regional Working Group were held in 2017, aimed at, inter alia, increasing awareness and understanding of the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing problem in the Caribbean region and also increasing the capacity of States to more effectively collaborate in preventing, deterring and eliminating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Caribbean region.

[3] The project is entitled "Establishing the Caribbean observing network for ocean acidification and its impact on harmful algal blooms, using nuclear and isotopic techniques".

45. Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017 devastated various islands in the Caribbean region and had a detrimental effect on the fisheries sector. The FAO, through the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, provided fisheries disaster needs assessment guidance to the affected countries and developed and supported various emergency projects for the sector's rehabilitation in Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda. Various Commission members also provided support to each other in the aftermath of the natural disasters.

46. With support from the Caribbean Billfish Project, a regional workshop on recreational fisheries statistics in the Caribbean was held in June 2017. The workshop brought together 38 representatives from 13 Caribbean countries, regional fisheries bodies, fisheries technical advisory institutions, non-governmental organizations, fishery statistics specialists and other relevant stakeholders. Participants' knowledge of regional fishery data challenges and their capacities to address these challenges effectively were developed during the workshop.

E. Moving towards a blue economy

47. Marine-based tourism is a major contributor to the economy of many Caribbean countries. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that in 2016, travel and tourism, in terms of economic impact (direct, indirect and induced), accounted for 14.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), with many countries having a much greater dependence on the sector. For example, travel and tourism accounted for 30.3 per cent of GDP for Jamaica, 39.9 per cent for Barbados, 44.8 per cent for the Bahamas and 60.4 per cent for Antigua and Barbuda.

48. As such, a growing number of Caribbean States have expressed their desire to explore sustainable, ocean-based economy policies, in recognition of the countless benefits to be derived therefrom in terms of food, employment, foreign exchange, culture and recreation. Through the development and use of evidence-based policy interventions at the national and regional levels, for example, in the fisheries, trade and tourism sectors, the marine environment can make significantly enhanced contributions to economic growth, welfare and prosperity, provide countries with a basis for pursuing low-carbon and resource-efficient development and boost national policy coherence.

49. The Caribbean region has embraced the notion of reaping economic benefits from its ocean spaces as the centrepiece of future growth strategies and has begun to put in place policy, legal and institutional frameworks to address this. Grenada has made several strides in that regard. During the 2017 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, the Government of Grenada fostered a partnership with the Ministry of Economic Affairs) of the Government of the Netherlands on a project to support Grenada's national transformation to a blue economy ocean State and the development of a national blue economy and oceans governance institute. The partnership is aimed at supporting sustainable increases in the productivity of marine food systems, single-use and multi-use coastal and ocean spaces, the livelihoods of coastal populations that are threatened by climate change and practices that contribute to sustainable use of coastal and marine resources. A concept note for optimizing Grenada's coastal, marine and ocean resources and establishing a dedicated institute in the country for blue growth and oceans governance will be developed.

F. Activities of the Caribbean Sea Commission

50. Activities of the Caribbean Sea Commission are described in the annex to the present report. During the reporting period, the Commission focused, inter alia, on revitalization of its work and, in that regard, the Association of Caribbean States continued to position the Commission as the primary mechanism for coordination and cooperation in activities promoting the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. For the 2016–2018 period, the Commission is building on that momentum by continuing to coordinate projects and activities aimed at preserving the Caribbean Sea and continuing its work to develop the proposed new concept of a special area in the context of sustainable development, with the ultimate goal of designating the Caribbean Sea as such an area. Other notable activities during the 2016–2018 period include the Association's participation in the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 held in 2017.

51. Through its recent revitalization, the Caribbean Sea Commission is pursuing actively the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea, including with such activities as joint research, management projects, meetings and information-sharing mechanisms aimed at improving coordination and cooperation in marine environmental management issues and in the relevant decision-making processes.

IV. Possible legal and financial implications of the concept of designating the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development

52. The call to designate the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development was first made at a Caribbean ministerial meeting held in 1997 on the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Caribbean Sea Commission was created under the auspices of the Association of Caribbean States in 2006 and identified as the mechanism for pursuing the goal that designation.

53. In working towards that goal, the Caribbean Sea Commission has divided its activities into two parallel work streams, focusing on: (a) coordinating marine preservation in the region and maximizing collaborative project opportunities; and (b) developing the concept of a special area in the context of sustainable development through consultation, consensus and awareness building. The second stream of work will take into account the existing international legal framework, including applicable global and regional agreements. As the Secretary-General has stated previously, those agreements include in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, as well as other international instruments that implement or further develop its general principles.[4]

54. Any assessment of the financial implications of designating the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development would first depend on the exact definition of the concept of such a special area, the extent of its application, its legal status in international law and an assessment of the intended impacts, against some previously defined baseline. That work is still ongoing by the Association of Caribbean States (see annex).

[4] See A/65/301, paras. 5–13.

V. Conclusion

55. Member States in the wider Caribbean region have continued in the current biennium to work collaboratively on behalf of their shared resource, the Caribbean Sea. They have been supported in their efforts by the international community, including partner Governments, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector. Their efforts address economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development and often include capacity-building components. In addition, the ecosystem-based approach has been adopted in many cases, which has made it possible to consider the cumulative impacts of environmental issues and challenges on the Caribbean marine environment and for policymakers to work across sectors to manage species and habitats, economic activities, conflicting uses and the sustainability of resources.

Annex

Progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/224

Report of the Caribbean Sea Commission of the Association of Caribbean States

I. Introduction

1. The Caribbean Sea is considered to be a semi-enclosed sea and the most geopolitically complex large marine ecosystem in the world. This is owing to the fact that it has the highest number of countries of the world's large marine ecosystems, and the highest number of maritime boundaries of any large marine ecosystem in the world. The Caribbean Sea is considered to be the common patrimony of the peoples of the greater Caribbean region. It is a fragile and complex marine area shared by countries of varying sizes and with different levels of progress in their sustainable development. The populations of those countries depend upon the sea for their development and draw from it their cultural identity. Therefore, in order to facilitate the sustainable management and development of the Caribbean Sea, it is necessary to promote structures that connect the wider region to facilitate coordination of projects and policies that relate to the Caribbean Sea.

2. The Caribbean Sea Initiative was established in 1999 out of the recognition by Caribbean member States that the Caribbean Sea had unique characteristics, including the fact that it was semi-enclosed, that it had a high level of vulnerability and that there was a need to administer its resources in a sustainable way.

3. The Caribbean Sea Commission was subsequently created under the auspices of the Association of Caribbean States in 2006 as a follow-up commission to the Caribbean Sea Initiative. The Caribbean Sea Commission has been designated as the mechanism to pursue the goal of having the Caribbean Sea designated a special area in the context of sustainable development. The creation of the Commission reflected the commitment of member States of the Association of Caribbean States to preserve and protect the Caribbean Sea. It has worked since then to improve the coordination of preservation efforts in the wider Caribbean region.

4. During the 2014–2016 period, the member States of the Association of Caribbean States revitalized the work of the Commission through the execution of a consultancy mandated by Heads of Government to assess the implications of the special area status, hosting the first symposium of the Caribbean Sea Commission and contracting a Programme Coordinator.

5. The coastal areas of the wider Caribbean region are considered to be particularly vulnerable to the effects of anthropogenic climate change, particularly sea-level rise and extreme events such as hurricanes, given the large number of small island developing States.

6. Continuing the revitalization work that started during the 2014–2016 period, the Association of Caribbean States has continued to position the Commission as the primary mechanism for coordination and cooperation in activities promoting the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. For the 2016–2018 period, the Commission has built on this momentum by continuing to coordinate projects and activities aimed at preserving the Caribbean Sea as the common patrimony of its member States and developing a process of consultation for achieving a consensus on the concept of a special area in the context of sustainable development.

7. Notable highlights in the 2016–2018 period include the Association's participation in the landmark 2017 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The Association's main objectives align with several of the targets outlined, including conserving and increasing the resilience of the Caribbean Sea area and its coasts, addressing issues such as ocean acidification and maximizing the benefits of marine resources through sustainable practices.

8. The present report provides an outline of the activities and progress made during the 2016–2018 period and the proposed activities for 2018–2019 period, as they relate to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/224, entitled "Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for the present and future generations", as follows:

(a) Introduction of the Caribbean Sea Commission Parallel Process;

(b) Launch of the sandy shorelines project;

(c) Deepening collaboration with regional institutions;

(d) Future activities of the Commission.

II. Caribbean Sea Commission parallel process

9. At the first extraordinary meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission, held on 5 February 2018, the Association of Caribbean States proposed a new approach to classifying the activities of the Caribbean Sea Commission. Recognizing the requests made by General Assembly in its resolution 71/224 and by the Secretary General in his previous report (A/71/265), the Association and the Commission have developed the Caribbean Sea Commission parallel process to define the special area while coordinating its preservation. This process was developed through a series of consultations and concept papers and is divided into two parallel "streams" of activities.

10. The first stream is entitled "Coordinating marine preservation in the region and maximizing collaborative project opportunities". This stream recognizes that special area designation by the General Assembly must be supported by a practical work programme of projects and initiatives that coordinate the management of these shared resources.

11. The second stream, entitled "Achieving special area in the context of sustainable development through consultation, consensus and awareness building" provides a road map for achieving a clear definition of the concept of a special area in the context of sustainable development. This is particularly important as the member States of the Association of Caribbean States are seeking to establish a new concept without prejudice to international law.

A. Stream 1: Coordinating marine preservation in the region and maximizing collaborative project opportunities

12. This stream involves the implementation of tangible projects for cooperative management of the Caribbean Sea through the enhancement of relationships with key institutions related to the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. The following proposals are intended to be achieved through the work programme of the Commission.

13. *Implementation of the Havana projects*. Cognizant of the instructions laid out in the Havana Declaration and the 2016–2018 Plan of Action, the Commission continues to implement the projects defined therein. The flagship project of the Commission, "sandy Shorelines", described in the present report, establishes a template for future cooperation and coordination projects to be executed by the Commission.

14. *Coordination of regional maritime efforts through collaboration*. The Commission intends to continue building relationships with key regional projects and initiatives through the establishment of project partnerships and, where appropriate, memorandums of understanding. Thee coordination efforts are intended to reduce duplication of effort and enhance the communication of science, solutions and resource opportunities for Association of Caribbean States decision makers. Initially, partnerships are proposed with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Caribbean Environment Programme, the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization(OSPESCA), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems Project and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, through collaboration on existing projects of the Association or on the joint development of new projects for consideration.

15. *Facilitation of relevant existing legal agreements*. The Commission, where requested by its member States, will facilitate the ratification of relevant international agreements to bring the member States of the Association under a common legal standard. This role was articulated clearly in General Assembly resolutions 54/225 and 67/205.

B. Stream 2: Achieving special area in the context of sustainable development through consultation, consensus and awareness building.

16. Critical to achieving the status of special area in the context of sustainable development is internal consensus among the member States of the Association of Caribbean States on the definition of this concept. The Commission envisions that this will require a process of consultation, consensus and continued awareness building at the national, regional and, eventually, global levels.

17. This definition will consider existing global and regional agreements[1] to which member States of the Association are party, existing definitions of "special zone", the shortcomings of such agreements and their level of ratification among member States.

18. This definition will be based on the best available information on what makes the Caribbean Sea unique, and considering its unique nature, what member States desire regarding its management. These desires must reflect a concerted effort towards integrated management of the Caribbean Sea and a mechanism whose success is based on participation and consensus-building rather than on punitive actions.

19. The secretariat of the Commission recommends, as a two-year process, to be further elaborated as a project for funding as necessary, the convening of a special area in the context of sustainable development working group, comprising the members of the Caribbean Sea Commission's Legal and Scientific and Technical

[1] In particular, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, adopted in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, on 24 March 1983, and its protocols, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Sub-Commissions, the Commission's board and the secretariat of the Association. The working group would:

(a) Map existing legal concepts of a special area, particularly those which apply to the Caribbean Sea, and indicate how, through its work, the Commission could add value with a special area in the context of sustainable development. It is proposed that this step be led by the Legal Sub-Commission;

(b) Examine the conceptual elements of a "special area" within the relevant international instruments and determine how these could be extended and/or applied to the concept of special area in the context of sustainable development;

(c) Develop a draft working concept on a special area in the context of sustainable development. The concept would be defined as a starting ground for consultations by all member States.

20. During this process, the working group would benefit from inviting appropriate bodies such as the UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme (as implementing agency for the Cartagena Convention and its protocols), or representatives from the secretariats of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Caribbean Development Bank. The process would serve to enhance understanding of the gaps in the implementation of other agreements and identify how the Association and its Commission could add value in the current landscape without duplicating efforts.

III. "Sandy Shorelines" project

21. In the previous report of the Secretary General (A/71/265), the Commission detailed two proposed projects under the future activities of the Caribbean Sea Commission. These projects were presented by the Government of Cuba at the first meeting of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Commission. The projects focused on: the preservation of coral reefs; and on the management and monitoring of coastal erosion. The Association of Caribbean States has received funding for the latter project, which is currently being implemented.

22. The project, entitled "Impact assessment of climate change on sandy shorelines", focuses on building the coastal resilience of members of the Association of Caribbean States through coordinated and enhanced monitoring of coastal erosion and sea-level rise. It is the flagship project of the Commission and the Association. After concluding negotiations with the Korea International Cooperation Agency, the project, valued at $4.16 million, was launched on 28 July 2017.

23. The project is also supported financially by generous contributions from Turkey, which funded the critical inception phase of the project. In addition, the Netherlands provided financial support to facilitate the involvement of the Dutch associate members of the Association of Caribbean States.

24. Finally, the Caribbean Sea Commission is a partner on the CARIB-COAST INTERG project, which focuses on enhancing coastal erosion modelling and decision-making support in the French associate members of the Association of Caribbean States, namely, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Sint Maarten. The partnership on this project will supplement the efforts of the sandy shorelines project, while ensuring that efforts are coordinated with French associate members of the Association.

IV. Deepening collaboration with regional institutions

25. In recognition of the need to involve more member States of the Association of Caribbean States in projects, the Association's secretariat has been engaged in dialogue with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre in Belize regarding the possibility of jointly seeking additional funding for the sandy shorelines project and working together to deepen regional scientific collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

26 The Caribbean Sea Commission continues its discussions with UNEP to enable the latter's participation as an observer in the sandy shorelines project, so as to seek synergies and reduce duplication of efforts in the region.

27. Finally, cognizant of the high importance placed on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Commission is currently developing a concept paper on how it can assist in the implementation and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 14, (Life below water), through building partnerships with UNEP, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and other entities working in this area.

V. Future Activities of Caribbean Sea Commission

28. *Coral reef project*. The secretariat of the Association of Caribbean States continues to seek funding for its project on coral reefs, which entails the development of three aquarium bases in the Caribbean region to preserve coral genetic resources and enhance regional knowledge of regeneration methods and techniques.

29. *Second symposium of the Caribbean Sea Commission*. Building on the success of the first symposium, the second will continue to build recognition of the Caribbean Sea Commission as the primary high-level science policy forum for marine environmental issues. The three-day symposium will focus on:

(a) Fundraising and joint project development: through the presentation of past success stories and new collaborative project concepts. The session of the symposium will explore South-South and triangular cooperative project opportunities;

(b) Improving information flow at the science policy interface: the session will focus on topics deemed of particular importance by the Commission. Regional experts will present state-of-the-art science, projections and management recommendations to regional decision makers, regional institutions and national representatives.

30. *Caribbean Sea Commission databank*. While the implementation of the databank has been delayed, the Commission remains committed to implementing the project. In 2018, the Sub-Commissions of the Caribbean Sea Commission will be convened to address the implementation process. The key features of the databank remain the same, as follows:

(a) An online database of national and regional projects related to the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea;

(b) A database of best practice guides and case studies of management responses;

(c) A database of regional experts to address emerging topics/specific critical issues.

VI. Conclusion

31. The member States of the Association of States and its Caribbean Sea Commission remain committed to the goal of achieving special area recognition for the Caribbean Sea in the context of sustainable development. The Association remains the ideal body for coordinating the management of this shared resource for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, its wide membership base of 35 members and associate members that have coastlines on the Caribbean Sea, the variety of states and protectorates in the Caribbean Region, its geographic scope, its focus on key issues related to sustainable development within its directorates[2] and its hosting of the Caribbean Sea Commission.

32. The Commission remains committed to the activation of the concept of coordinated and collaborative management through the implementation of tangible projects focusing on joint research and information-sharing mechanisms as well as through the building of relationships with appropriate bodies and initiatives, particularly those of the United Nations system.

33. The Association of Caribbean States and the Caribbean Sea Commission also remain committed to supporting greater inclusion of all groups in the decision-making process. This includes incorporating the voices of indigenous communities, women, young people and other vulnerable groups in fulfilling the mandates of the Commission and the wider Association. The Association therefore sees great potential for collaboration between the United Nations and the Association of Caribbean States in areas of advocacy, policy and awareness for these groups.

34. In particular, the Association of Caribbean States and the Commission remain committed to supporting greater participation of young people in the decision-making process. This includes incorporating the voices and perspectives of the region's youth in fulfilling the mandates of the Caribbean Sea Commission and the wider Association.

34. Building on the momentum generated in the 2016–2018 period, the Association of Caribbean States and its Caribbean Sea Commission look forward to reporting to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, in 2020, on a consensus definition of its concept of a special area in the context of sustainable development, following its internal proposed process of consultation as detailed in the present report.

35. Cognizant of the geopolitical complexity, high levels of social and economic dependence and extreme levels of vulnerability of coastal and marine areas of Caribbean member States, as illustrated by the 2017 hurricane season, the Association of Caribbean States is ever aware of the importance of the work of its Caribbean Sea Commission in preserving this common patrimony and core element of Caribbean life and identity. The Association of Caribbean States is thus grateful for the consideration of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Secretary-General in this matter.

[2] The Association of Caribbean States hosts directorates responsible for the issues of sustainable tourism, disaster risk reduction, transportation, and trade and external economic relations.